Richard Nixon and Vietnam: Ending the War
Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12  Curriculum Focus: World History  Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Student Objectives

- Examine Richard Nixon’s policies concerning the Vietnam War in 1969, including Vietnamization.
- Read the main arguments of Vietnam veteran John Kerry and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in 1971 in opposition to the continuation of the war.
- Examine the variety of opinions that civilians voiced regarding the war.

Materials

- Video on unitedstreaming: Commander in Chief: Richard Nixon
  Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.
  Selected clips that support this lesson plan:
  1. The Situation in Vietnam and at Home Prior to Nixon's Election
  2. Tet Offensive
  3. Vietnamization, Resolution 9, and the Death of Ho Chi Minh
  4. American Death Toll Increases and the Pentagon Papers are Released
  5. Negotiations for Peace

- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- Computers with Internet access (optional)

Procedures

1. Hold a 10- to 15-minute class discussion to review students’ basic knowledge of the Vietnam War. Use the following questions as guidelines:
   - Where is Vietnam?
   - Who fought against whom in the Vietnam War?
Why did the U.S. become involved in Vietnam, and why did it increase its involvement into the 1970s?

What specific events marked the beginning of our active military campaign against North Vietnam? (e.g., the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution)

What was the initial public sentiment regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

What was President Johnson’s attitude toward U.S. involvement in Vietnam? What was President Nixon’s attitude toward the war?

How did the war change under President Nixon’s administration?

Was the Vietnam War overwhelmingly popular among American civilians? Explain your answer.

2. Ask students to describe what they know, or believe they know, about Americans’ reaction to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What are their impressions of this era? What images have they seen of the activities that went on at this time?

3. Inform students that not everyone was opposed to the war. Ask students if they know of any present-day leaders (such as George W. Bush) who did not participate in such demonstrations in the 1960s. It’s important for students to realize that, while antiwar sentiments were strong, some young people agreed with the policies of the U.S. government or felt ambivalent about the war and its protestors.

4. Have students, individually or in pairs, go to the following Web sites for reasons that Americans in the 1960s favored or opposed the Vietnam War. You may want to print these documents and have students complete this part of the lesson as homework.

   - Nixon’s Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam: “The Silent Majority” Speech, November 3, 1969
   - Vietnam War Veteran John Kerry’s Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 22, 1971
     http://www.richmond.edu/~ebolt/history398/JohnKerryTestimony.html

5. As they read these documents, ask students to take notes to address the questions below.

   - What did Nixon believe would be the consequences of immediate U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam?
   - What specific events did Nixon cite to support his arguments against “precipitate troop withdrawal”?
   - What is meant by “silent majority”?
   - What did John Kerry believe about the alleged threat that North Vietnam posed to the U.S.?
   - What did John Kerry believe were the results of Nixon’s policies, as spelled out in the silent majority speech?
   - What did Nixon mean by Vietnamization? What did Kerry think of this policy?
6. Divide the class into pairs. Ask each pair of students to pretend they’re good friends who are 18-year-old U.S. citizens in 1971. They’re both well educated and aware of major news events (including important political speeches), and they’ve each given a good deal of thought to how the United States government should handle the Vietnam situation. They’ve also both received draft notifications and have been called to active duty in Vietnam. One student should be in favor of the war, and the other should oppose it. Have them work together to write a conversation they might have when discussing their reactions to being drafted. The dialogues should address what each person thinks about the war and how each person justifies his or her opinions about the war. Each student must provide specific examples and rationales to support their position about U.S. participation in the war. Students should use examples from the Web documents.

7. As a homework assignment, have students conduct the interview shown below. Ask them to share their results with the class and discuss the significance of their findings.

**Interview Questions**

Interview your parents, your grandparents, or other adults who remember the Vietnam War to find out what they thought about the United States’ involvement in this conflict. The people you interview should have been old enough to be aware of the situation in Vietnam and develop opinions about it. Pose the following questions and add one or two of your own. In class, you will present your findings and participate in a discussion about the survey results.

- Where were you living in 1969?
- What did you think about the Vietnam War in 1969? Why did you have this opinion?
- What did you think of President Nixon in 1969? Why did you have this opinion?
- What is your opinion of the Vietnam War today? Have you changed your opinion since 1969? Why or why not?

**Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students’ work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Active participation in class discussion; cooperative and efficient work with partner; thorough completion of the classroom and take-home activity sheets; clear and thoughtful language.
- **2 points:** Some participation in classroom discussion; adequate work with partner; failure to complete some of the questions on the classroom and take-home activity sheets; clear language.
- **1 point:** Minimal effort in class discussion; poor work with partner; failure to convey an understanding of the material; incomplete classroom and take-home activity sheet; failure to use clear and thoughtful language.

**Vocabulary**
Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

*Definition:* The congressional resolution of August 1964 that gave the president broad war powers with relation to North Vietnam and served as the legal basis for the Johnson administration to commit ground troops to Vietnam.

*Context:* The United States government formulated the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution after having allegedly been fired at on two separate days by North Vietnam, although the second attack has never been confirmed.

My Lai massacre

*Definition:* A notorious incident in which United States troops massacred at least 100 and perhaps as many as 200 civilians in the hamlet of My Lai.

*Context:* When the American public began to hear about the My Lai massacre, antiwar sentiment swelled, as many were horrified to hear about the United States’ role in so many civilian deaths.

Precipitate withdrawal

*Definition:* President Nixon’s term to describe the immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam; he used the word precipitate to imply that an immediate withdrawal would be rash and reckless.

*Context:* President Nixon felt that a “precipitate withdrawal” of American troops from Vietnam would be a mistake.

Viet Cong

*Definition:* Communist-trained South Vietnamese rebels

*Context:* During the Vietnam War, U.S. soldiers frequently had trouble distinguishing between the friendly South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

Academic Standards

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link: [http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp](http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp)

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – United States History: Understands developments in foreign policy and domestic politics between the Nixon and Clinton presidencies
- History – World History: Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up
- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts; Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to http://www.socialstudies.org

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Civic Ideals and Practices
- Global Connections

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html